

**To:** Metrolinx Board of Directors  
**From:** Mark Childs, *Chief Marketing & Communications Officer*  
**Date:** September 10, 2020  
**Re:** Marketing & Communications Quarterly Update

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## **Executive Summary**

Supporting customers with effective change communication across the region has been the team's focus through the COVID-19 pandemic. The Marketing and Communications teams worked to reassure riders, educating them about health and safety measures, encouraging residents to choose transit as the Province moved to Stage 3. Work on strategic initiatives to improve customer experience, and preparing for more people returning to transit and workplaces, continued to help position Metrolinx for future ridership recovery.

### **1. Early signs of growth**

In April 2020, at the peak of COVID-19, boardings reflected workplace closures at 2.7 per cent of prior year figures. Since April 6, numbers have increased steadily with 18 weeks of consecutive growth and July ridership at 8.5 per cent of the 2019 level.

### **2. Proactive steps towards recovery**

Ensuring customer awareness of Metrolinx health and safety measures in our stations and on vehicles has been essential to rebuilding ridership. Over the last quarter, the *Safety Never Stops* campaign highlighted more than 40 initiatives including mandatory face coverings, health & safety kiosks in our stations and the introduction of seat dividers on our buses and trains. It also reminded riders to 'buy before you board' and check schedules when planning trips. The integrated Marketing & Communications campaign for GO Transit and UP Express brought to life messaging with a familiar GO smile now featured across more than 220 assets with thousands of customer facings across our network. From online videos to social media, Metrolinx content delivered clear messaging with an 'edutainment' approach. The team successfully rolled out social media tools to enable faster customer response and engagement.

July GO e-ticket sales nearly doubled compared to June, providing customers convenient, pre-planned and contact-free payment.

Metrolinx News surpassed all expectations for reaching people as it recorded historically strong engagement numbers, logging over 225,000 views and more than 130,000 unique visitors.

### 3. Positioning for future growth

The team continues to monitor the impact of COVID-19 to understand the greatest opportunities to support ridership recovery through research and analytics. To date, 60 per cent of ridership is now off-peak, compared to 40 per cent before COVID-19. GO gave riders a staycation option with the reinstatement of weekend Niagara service, just in time for Simcoe Day. The 2,500 August long weekend boardings surpassed the 1,900, pre-COVID-19, Family Day total. WEGO combo tickets and GO e-ticket sales made up 40 per cent of those transactions.

September service changes were announced the week of August 17 with new schedules taking effect on September 5. The reinstatement of over 150 rail trips included more frequent peak and mid-day services to meet the flexible work needs of our customers, and evening and weekend trains to provide weekend travel across the region and to visit family and friends. Media, customer and stakeholder outreach contributed to a successful announcement.

Bus ridership has moved from 20 to 40 percent of overall ridership during COVID-19, so some routes will see peak service increase from hourly to 30-minute frequency.

Customer-direct communication was amplified with 450 media calls, delivering messages in support of COVID-19 response, the reintroduction of weekend GO train service to Niagara Falls, September service changes, the Eglinton Crosstown Extension and Scarborough Subway Extension RFPs, and other news.

Digital public engagement delivered updates on major projects. This quarter saw seven formal engagements with 13,000 participants. Other activities included 35 public meetings and 1,500 interactions related to GO Expansion and Rapid Transit projects.

Stakeholder outreach to employers, post-secondary institutions and the utility sector has helped inform Metrolinx return to workplace planning.

We continued to support our strategic event partners through virtual support of the Toronto Pride Parade, the Toronto Caribbean Carnival and the CNE, encouraging travel for 2021.

Non-Fare strategic partner plans continued to be developed. Advertising digital billboards and bridge signage were advanced, including the launch of the new 401/Kennedy location. Partnership initiatives that enhance the customer experience include the return of Balzac's to serve UP customers, and progress on food & beverage and vending machine offerings for customers.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Childs  
*Chief Marketing & Communications Officer*